

Cumberland County Natural Area Inventory

GORDON BUTLER/HOPE MILLS PRESERVE

Site significance: county

Quadrangle: Hope Mills

Size: 33 acres

Ownership: NC Botanical Garden

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: Gordon Butler/Hope Mills Preserve protects a small population of white wicky (*Kalmia cuneata*), a Federal Species of Concern. It also protects a population of the regionally rare sand myrtle (*Leiophyllum buxifolium*), found in the Sandhills Region only along the Rockfish Creek drainage. The site is perhaps unique in having three species of laurels growing in close proximity: mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), white wicky, and Carolina sheep-laurel (*K. carolina*).

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: The preserve lies at the edge of downtown Hope Mills at the end of Davis Street, on the south edge of a narrow arm of Hope Mills Lake, part of Little Rockfish Creek. Rockfish Creek Corridor natural area lies a little more than two miles downstream.

SITE DESCRIPTION: The western end of the site consists of a xeric knoll dominated by longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) and turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*) with scattered Carolina wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*) and lots of dwarf huckleberry (*Gaylussacia dumosa*). The knoll drops steeply down to a flat terrace that varies from moist to dry conditions and supports Pine/Scrub Oak Sandhill, Streamhead Pocosin, and Cypress-Gum Swamp plant communities. Sand myrtle occurs mostly in ecotones transitional between drier and wetter habitats. White wicky occurs only at the margin of the seepage associated with a broad Streamhead Pocosin. The latter is dominated by pond pine (*Pinus serotina*) and a high diversity of evergreen and deciduous shrub species - over 30 species have been documented. These shrubs now are exceedingly dense and tall from lack of fire.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: The entire preserve is fire-suppressed and needs repeated prescribed burns to restore the plant communities to health. Hardwoods have invaded all communities and are shading out flowering herbs and grasses. A portion of this site is a Registered Natural Heritage Area.

NATURAL COMMUNITIES: Cypress-Gum Swamp (Blackwater Subtype), Pine/Scrub Oak Sandhill Blackjack Variant, Streamhead Pocosin, Xeric Sandhill Scrub Sandhills Variant.

RARE PLANTS: White wicky (*Kalmia cuneata*).

REFERENCES:

NC NHP. 1979. Hope Mills Bog. Compilation for files, N.C. Natural Heritage Program, Division of Parks and Recreation, DENR, Raleigh, N.C.